

Success Beyond the Stacks: Narratives of Former BIPOC Students in Academic Library  
Employment

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### **Abstract**

This conceptual paper, representing the fourth cohort in a series of cohort-based investigations, is dedicated to exploring the experiences and career trajectories of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) alumni who worked for the Florida State University (FSU) Libraries during their academic tenure. This study investigates 'How has part-time employment at FSU Libraries impacted the professional development and career paths of BIPOC alumni from Florida State University (FSU), Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University (FAMU), Tallahassee State College (TSC) and other institutions of higher education in the Tallahassee Area and its significance in highlighting the often-overlooked narratives of the BIPOC community. Further, it compares the experiences and outcomes of Cohort 4 with Cohorts 1-3, examining any differences and their underlying factors. This secondary inquiry delves into the evolving impact and dynamics of part-time employment across cohorts, aiming for a deeper understanding of professional development trends within the BIPOC community at FSU Libraries. By concentrating on this cohort, the study aims to illuminate the unique experiences, challenges, and achievements of these alumni and to contribute a critical perspective historically underrepresented in library and information science research. This includes examining how their racial and cultural identities may have influenced their work experiences and, subsequently, their professional lives post-graduation.

In addition to contributing to a broader understanding of the impact of part-time library employment on student employees, this conceptual paper aims to compare and contrast the experiences of the BIPOC cohort with those of previous cohorts. This comparative analysis will enable us to identify any evolving trends or changes in the library and campus work environment over time, particularly concerning diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, the study seeks to inform policy and practice, offering actionable insights for FSU Libraries, and possibly other academic institutions, to enhance work experience for current and future BIPOC student employees. These insights are crucial for developing strategies that ensure equitable opportunities and support, fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment(s).

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students employed within academic libraries. Historically, research has focused on BIPOC students' academic and social experiences without considering their employment roles<sup>i</sup>. For instance, Harper<sup>ii</sup> discusses how higher education research often minimizes the impact of racist institutional norms on students of color. Similarly, Smith explore the psychosocial challenges faced by African American male students in predominantly white institutions.

Conversely, studies on student employment in academic libraries tend to address general experiences without specific attention to racial or ethnic identities<sup>iii</sup>. Perini<sup>iv</sup> examines the benefits of employing undergraduate students in libraries but does not delve into how race may influence these experiences. The lack of studies examining both identities concurrently indicates a significant gap in the literature<sup>vivivii</sup>. Brook et al. highlight the need to address whiteness and promote antiracist practices within academic libraries. Cooke<sup>viii</sup> calls for culturally competent library professionals to better serve diverse populations, emphasizing the importance of understanding intersectional identities. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing inclusive policies and practices within academic libraries. The findings of this study will offer valuable insights for library administrators, educators, and policymakers dedicated to fostering equitable and supportive environments. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education institutions by highlighting the nuanced experiences of BIPOC student employees.

### **Research Questions**

This study aims to explore the impact of part-time employment at Florida State University (FSU) Libraries on the professional development and career paths of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) alumni from higher education institutions in the Tallahassee area, including FSU, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University (FAMU), Tallahassee State College (TSC), and others. By focusing on this specific demographic, the research seeks to illuminate the often-overlooked narratives of the BIPOC community within academic library settings. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How has part-time employment at FSU Libraries influenced the professional development and career trajectories of BIPOC alumni from FSU, FAMU, TSC, and other higher education institutions in the Tallahassee area, and what is the significance of these experiences in highlighting the underrepresented narratives of the BIPOC community? By investigating this question, the study aims to provide meaningful insights that not only fill a gap in the existing literature but also inform policies and practices to foster more inclusive and supportive environments for BIPOC students within academic libraries.

### **Significance**

Investigating these questions is critical for several reasons. First, it addresses a gap in the existing literature by examining the intersectionality of racial identity and student employment within academic libraries—a topic that has been largely underrepresented in prior research. Second, the study provides valuable insights into how part-time employment opportunities can serve as catalysts for professional development among BIPOC students, potentially influencing their career trajectories in meaningful ways.

By highlighting the experiences of BIPOC alumni, the research underscores the importance of inclusive employment practices and support systems within academic institutions. The findings are expected to inform library administrators, policymakers, and educators about the unique

needs and contributions of BIPOC student employees. Ultimately, this study aims to promote equity and inclusion by bringing forward the narratives of a community that has been historically marginalized in academic discourse.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are multifaceted. Firstly, it seeks to assess the impact of part-time employment at FSU Libraries on the professional skill sets of BIPOC alumni. By examining how such employment contributes to the development of competencies relevant to their future careers, the study aims to highlight the practical benefits of student roles within academic libraries. Secondly, the research intends to understand the influence of library employment on the career decisions and advancements of BIPOC graduates. This involves exploring the extent to which experiences gained during their tenure at FSU Libraries have shaped their professional aspirations and facilitated opportunities post-graduation. Thirdly, the study aims to identify the challenges faced by BIPOC student employees and to propose strategies to address them. By uncovering specific barriers encountered in the workplace, the research can inform the development of supportive measures designed to enhance the experiences and outcomes of future BIPOC student employees.

Finally, the study endeavors to enrich the academic conversation on diversity and inclusion by incorporating the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals in academic library settings. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how these narratives can inform policies and practices that foster a more inclusive and equitable environment within higher education institutions. Through these objectives, the research not only seeks to fill a significant gap in the literature but also aspires to have a practical impact on the policies and practices of academic libraries. By providing a nuanced understanding of the experiences of BIPOC student employees, the study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. In this research, we aim to contribute to the broader efforts of fostering an inclusive academic environment that recognizes and values the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all its members.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding this study is rooted in the concepts of social identity and intersectionality. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw<sup>ix</sup>, emphasizes the interconnectedness of social categorizations such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexuality, which can create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. This framework is essential for examining how racial and cultural identities impact professional experiences and development, particularly among BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) student employees in academic libraries.

Racial and cultural identities significantly influence professional experiences and development. For BIPOC individuals, systemic inequalities and biases can affect access to opportunities, mentorship, and career advancement within professional settings<sup>x</sup>. In academic libraries, BIPOC student employees may encounter unique challenges related to representation, inclusivity, and cultural competency<sup>xi</sup>. These challenges can manifest as microaggressions, tokenism, or feelings of isolation, all of which can hinder professional growth and development<sup>xii</sup>. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals possess multiple, overlapping identities that collectively impact their experiences. By exploring the intersection of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexuality, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the professional development of student employees.

### **BIPOC Students and Intersectionality**

BIPOC students often navigate educational and professional spaces that were not designed with their identities in mind. This can lead to systemic barriers that affect their professional development, such as limited access to networks and resources<sup>xiii</sup>. In the context of academic libraries, BIPOC student employees may lack representation in leadership positions, which can impact their perceptions of career viability within the field<sup>xiv</sup>. First-generation students—those who are the first in their families to attend college—face unique obstacles related to institutional knowledge and cultural capital<sup>xv</sup>. When intersecting with racial and ethnic identities, these challenges can be compounded. First-generation BIPOC students may experience heightened levels of imposter syndrome and may require additional support to navigate professional environments effectively<sup>xvi</sup>.

Furthermore, the immigrant experience adds another layer of complexity to the professional development of BIPOC student employees. Immigrant students, particularly those who are BIPOC, often confront additional challenges such as language barriers, cultural adjustment difficulties, and unfamiliarity with the educational and professional norms of their host country<sup>xvii</sup>. These challenges can exacerbate feelings of isolation and marginalization, impacting their confidence and ability to seek out professional opportunities<sup>xviii</sup>. In academic library settings, immigrant BIPOC student employees may struggle with integrating into workplace cultures that do not reflect their own, hindering their professional growth and career aspirations<sup>xix</sup>.

The library profession has historically been dominated by white women, leading to a workforce that reflects limited diversity in both race and gender<sup>xx</sup>. This demographic trend has implications for representation and inclusivity within the field. White women constitute the majority of library professionals, which can perpetuate a monocultural work environment that may not fully address the needs and perspectives of BIPOC individuals<sup>xxi</sup>. This dominance can

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influence hiring practices, workplace culture, and professional development opportunities. Black men are among the least represented groups in the library field<sup>xxii</sup>. Their underrepresentation can lead to feelings of isolation and may deter other Black men from pursuing careers in librarianship. This lack of diversity can also limit the range of perspectives and experiences within the profession, affecting service delivery and community engagement. The intersection of these various identities—race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation—creates a unique set of experiences that impact the professional development of student employees. Understanding this intersectionality is crucial for developing support systems and policies that address the specific needs of these individuals. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of identity, academic libraries can foster environments that promote equity, inclusion, and professional growth for all student employees.

Synthesizing these identities within the framework of intersectionality is essential because it recognizes that individuals experience social categories—such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and immigrant status—not in isolation but as interconnected facets that collectively shape their experiences. For BIPOC student employees, the intersection of these identities can result in unique forms of discrimination and disadvantage that are not fully captured when each identity is examined separately<sup>xxiii</sup>. For instance, an immigrant, first-generation BIPOC student may face compounded barriers due to racism, xenophobia, and a lack of cultural capital, which together intensify their challenges in professional settings<sup>xxiv</sup>. Similarly, LGBTQIA BIPOC students encounter multiple layers of marginalization due to the intersection of race, sexual orientation, and, potentially, immigrant status<sup>xxv</sup>. Studying these intersecting identities is crucial within the intersectionality framework because it allows for a more nuanced understanding of how systemic inequities impact professional development. It highlights the need for inclusive policies and support systems that address the specific challenges faced by individuals at these intersections<sup>xxvi</sup>, such as structured interview processes (rubrics and standardized questions) to mitigate biases during the interview process, and inclusive development opportunities, to assist in retaining BIPOC student employees once they are hired.

### **BIPOC Student Employment in Academic Libraries**

BIPOC students often face systemic barriers in academic workplaces, including discrimination, microaggressions, and a lack of representation, which can significantly impact their professional experiences and development. Garvey et al. <sup>xxvii</sup>examine how racialized experiences manifest in higher education, highlighting that students of color often navigate environments where their identities are marginalized. Through counter-stories, they reveal the nuanced ways discrimination affects academic and professional lives, leading to feelings of isolation and disengagement. In academic library settings, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Folk and Overbey <sup>xxviii</sup>in their exploration of Black and African American students'

experiences in libraries, discuss how racial and cultural identities influence workplace interactions. They note that BIPOC student employees often encounter cultural disconnects with peers and supervisors, which can hinder their sense of belonging and limit opportunities for professional growth<sup>xxix</sup>

Despite efforts to promote diversity, academic libraries continue to exhibit low representation of BIPOC individuals among their staff. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) reports that diversity numbers remain disproportionately low compared to the student populations served<sup>xxx</sup>. This lack of representation affects not only the inclusivity of the workplace but also the quality of services provided to diverse communities. The absence of BIPOC professionals in leadership roles means that BIPOC student employees often lack mentors who share their cultural backgrounds, impacting their perceptions of career viability within the field. Part-time employment in libraries, however, offers significant opportunities for BIPOC students. These roles provide avenues for skill development, such as information literacy, customer service, and technological competencies. Additionally, working within the library environment allows students to build professional networks and gain insights into potential career paths, which can be instrumental in overcoming systemic barriers.

Research indicates that part-time employment can positively influence the professional growth and career trajectories of students. Broadbridge and Swanson <sup>xxxi</sup> discuss the complexities of students managing dual roles as learners and employees, emphasizing that this balancing act can enhance employability through the development of time management skills and workplace competencies. For BIPOC students, these benefits are crucial in navigating a job market where they may face additional obstacles due to systemic discrimination.

Choo et al. <sup>xxxii</sup> provide a comprehensive review of the school-work-life interface, noting that while student employment can introduce stressors, it also offers valuable experiences that contribute to career readiness. They highlight that the skills acquired through employment, such as adaptability and problem-solving, are highly sought after by employers. Part-time library employment, in particular, can shape future career choices and opportunities for BIPOC students. Racial and cultural identities play a critical role in shaping workplace experiences. Studies have shown that BIPOC students may face unique challenges due to cultural misunderstandings, implicit biases, and systemic inequities within library settings<sup>xxxiii</sup>. These factors can influence interactions with colleagues and supervisors, potentially leading to decreased job satisfaction and limited professional development opportunities. Understanding the impact of these identities is essential for creating inclusive work environments. By acknowledging and addressing the specific challenges faced by BIPOC student employees, academic libraries can implement strategies to support their professional growth.

### **Gaps in Literature and Rationale for Current Study**

The existing research on student employment in academic libraries reveals significant gaps, particularly concerning the experiences and trajectories of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) alumni. Despite growing efforts to foster diversity in higher education, BIPOC narratives in library employment remain underrepresented. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing policies that support BIPOC students' professional development and promote equity in academic libraries. While student populations are increasingly diverse, few studies focus on how part-time library work shapes BIPOC alumni's career paths.

Stewart et al.<sup>xxxiv</sup> note a “dearth of research on African American college students and their interactions in academic libraries”, with a nationwide questionnaire showing that while Black students generally feel welcome, their comfort hinges on inclusive campus climates. Black students are also less likely to use reference services, and interactions involving overt racism or microaggressions—often from other users—can undermine belonging<sup>xxxv</sup>. Chapman et al.<sup>xxxvi</sup> similarly found that although Duke University Libraries offered resources to meet many needs, negative user interactions and library spaces centering White history marginalized Black students. Such experiences indicate that the inclusivity of library environments can substantially shape feelings of welcomeness and support among BIPOC students.

Existing research often highlights issues like racial microaggressions and minimal BIPOC representation among library staff and leadership, contributing to isolation and underrepresentation<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Yet, few studies capture how part-time library employment influences BIPOC alumni's professional trajectories post-graduation. By overlooking these narratives, institutions miss the chance to understand how library roles can be catalysts for BIPOC students' long-term professional development. Filling this gap is essential not only for scholarly completeness but also for informing institutional policies and practices. Understanding the experiences of BIPOC alumni can guide the creation of supportive work environments, mentorship programs, and career development opportunities that are responsive to their needs<sup>xxxviii</sup>. Moreover, it can contribute to broader efforts to diversify the library profession and ensure that libraries are inclusive spaces for both employees and patrons. Addressing these issues is crucial for dismantling systemic barriers and fostering an environment where BIPOC students can thrive both academically and professionally.

Another significant gap in the literature is the lack of longitudinal studies that examine changes over time in BIPOC student employment experiences within academic libraries. Most existing research provides snapshots of experiences at a single point in time, which limits the ability to identify trends, shifts in workplace culture, or the impact of policy changes<sup>xxxix</sup>. Without longitudinal data, it is challenging to assess whether efforts to promote diversity and

inclusion are effective or to understand how the professional development needs of BIPOC students may evolve. Comparing different cohorts of BIPOC student employees can reveal important insights into how their experiences have changed in response to institutional initiatives, societal shifts, or evolving library practices. For instance, examining Cohort 4 alongside previous cohorts allows for the identification of patterns, progress, or persistent challenges that may not be apparent in isolated studies. Such comparative analyses can highlight areas where interventions have been successful and where further work is needed<sup>xi</sup>.

The justification for this approach acknowledges that race, employment, and education are dynamic. Societal movements like Black Lives Matter and increased focus on racial justice in academia can shift BIPOC student experiences over time. Longitudinal research helps institutions adapt strategies to support these students<sup>xli</sup> more effectively. By addressing underrepresented BIPOC narratives and comparing experiences across cohorts, this study fills critical gaps and informs policy and practice. Ultimately, the findings aim to create more inclusive, supportive academic library environments that promote the professional growth of BIPOC students.

### **Methodology**

Our study adopts an intersectionality methodology (IM) framework, deeply informed by Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal work on intersectionality<sup>xliixliiii</sup> and further elaborated by scholars such as Collins and Bilge<sup>xliiv</sup> and Haynes et al.<sup>xliiv</sup>. Intersectionality, as a critical analytical framework, allows for the examination of multiple, overlapping social categorizations—such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability—that contribute to systemic injustice and social inequality<sup>xlvixlvixlviii</sup>. This approach is vital for examining the layered experiences of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) alumni in academic libraries, where these intersecting identities uniquely influence their professional outcomes and lived experiences. This methodology is grounded in the belief that intersecting social categorizations create unique modes of discrimination and privilege, which are critical to understanding the complex realities of BIPOC individuals and avoiding the pitfalls of single-axis analysis<sup>xlix</sup>. By employing an intersectionality framework, we aim to capture the multidimensionality of BIPOC alumni experiences, acknowledging that traditional methodologies may overlook the nuanced ways in which multiple forms of oppression and identity interplay.

### **Research Design**

Consistent with the "intersectionality as a method" approach articulated by Haynes et al.<sup>i</sup> and further supported by McCall<sup>ii</sup>, our study employs a qualitative research design utilizing

semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to intersectional research as they allow for the exploration of participants' lived experiences in rich detail<sup>lii</sup>. This method provides the flexibility necessary to delve into the depth and nuance of participants' experiences as BIPOC individuals in academic library settings, capturing the complex interactions of systemic forces impacting their professional trajectories. The semi-structured interview format facilitates an open dialogue, enabling participants to articulate their experiences in their own words while allowing the researcher to probe for deeper understanding<sup>liii</sup>. This approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, which posits that reality is socially constructed and emphasizes the importance of understanding the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences<sup>liv</sup>.

### **Data Collection**

In alignment with the intersectionality methodology, data collection involves engaging BIPOC alumni through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants are selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure a diverse representation of BIPOC voices across different races, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and abilities<sup>lv</sup>. This method facilitates an exploration of their intersecting identities and experiences in a more personal and detailed manner, allowing for an enriched understanding of the structural, political, and representational dimensions of intersectionality as outlined by Crenshaw<sup>lvi</sup> and discussed by Haynes et al<sup>lvii</sup>. To capture the complexity of participants' experiences, interview questions are designed to elicit narratives around their professional journeys, challenges faced, and the influence of their intersecting identities on their careers in academic libraries. The interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and facilitate thorough analysis<sup>lviii</sup>.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the intersectional analytic framework suggested by Haynes et al. and the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke<sup>lix</sup>, our analysis involves identifying and interpreting patterns related to the intersectionality of participants' experiences. Thematic analysis is chosen for its flexibility and suitability for analyzing complex qualitative<sup>lx</sup>. The analysis process involves several stages: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Throughout the analysis, we pay close attention to how different identity intersections impact the professional experiences and development of BIPOC alumni in academic libraries, considering the specific contexts and systems of power that interact in their lives. To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis, strategies such as member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity are employed<sup>lxi</sup>. Member checking involves sharing findings with participants to validate interpretations, while reflexivity requires the researcher to continually

reflect on their own positionality and potential biases that may influence the research process<sup>lxii</sup>.

### **Ethical Considerations and Limitations**

This study adheres to ethical standards ensuring confidentiality and respect, given the sensitive nature of discussing discrimination<sup>lxiii</sup>. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. We applied for IRB approval; however, the Human Subjects Board determined it did not meet human subjects research criteria. In lieu of formal IRB consent, we used Memoranda of Understanding, mirroring typical consent language. Data were anonymized, securely stored, and pseudonyms used to protect identities. Participants also had access to support resources as needed. While this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of BIPOC alumni experiences through an intersectional lens, certain limitations exist. The qualitative nature and purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases related to memory recall and social desirability<sup>lxiv</sup>. Qualitative, purposive sampling and self-reported data may limit generalizability. Nonetheless, the depth of insight gained into participants' experiences, critical for intersectional research, outweighs these constraints.

### **Initial Findings**

#### **Informal Mentorship and Familial Relationships**

A recurring theme is the presence of informal mentorship that transcends traditional professional boundaries, often assuming a familial character. Stephen notes the absence of formal mentorship programs but emphasizes meaningful interactions with colleagues: "You know, we didn't really have formal mentorship. It was more about engagement with your boss and your team." He describes an older Black woman who "kind of played the 'auntie' role," highlighting that "it was more like a cultural thing. She really looked out for me and helped guide me from a professional standpoint, both at the university libraries and in how I presented myself."

Similarly, Stephen mentions another colleague who assumed a "big sister" role. He explains, "I relate these relationships to more of a familial aspect because they took on a caring mindset rather than a strictly professional mentorship role. It wasn't formal, but it was meaningful. I felt they truly cared about me and my progress in life, which is why I describe them as 'auntie' and 'big sister.'" The shared cultural identity played a significant role in these relationships. Stephen observes, "The 'auntie' and 'big sister' figures were both Black women, and maybe they took more of a liking to me because I was a young Black man. They helped

uplift and guide me. It was never anything negative; it just wasn't formal mentorship, but it was still very impactful."

### **Professional Guidance and Support Systems**

The impact of supervisors and staff who provided hands-on support is evident in the experiences shared. Stephen reflects on his boss's role: "Even my boss could be seen as a mentor. She guided me through different aspects of working at the library that I didn't understand, especially as I was still learning how to navigate the professional world." For Andje, the mentorship she received was pivotal in her professional development. She states, "The support I received, especially from Kirsten, was instrumental in helping me navigate the job application process for my first full-time position. Everyone was incredibly supportive, and I always felt they had my back." Kirsten's approach was notably proactive: "She provided detailed feedback on my cover letter and resume, and she was very hands-on in her approach. I had never received that level of support before, and it made all the difference." Beyond professional assistance, support extended into personal realms. As Andje recounts, "Liz from the admin office also offered her support beyond work-related matters. For instance, when I was considering buying a car while staying in Florida, she offered to accompany me or even send her husband to help, just to ensure that I felt comfortable and supported. Everyone was incredibly helpful and supportive."

### **Challenges of First-Generation Graduates and Immigrants**

Yamilee brings attention to the specific hurdles faced by first-generation graduates and immigrants. She articulates the absence of familial guidance in navigating higher education and professional environments: "It doesn't fix everything, especially if you're the first one to graduate. You can't lean on your parents. Who and say, 'Hey, Mom or Dad, when you were in school, like what did you know?' You're not building from the top; you're literally building from the bottom." The expectation of self-reliance is further emphasized: "If you're running into trouble, it's not like you can go back to your parents or your support system and ask for help because they honestly don't know. They sent you to school to figure it out like you should know since you got your degree."

Yamilee also discusses the cultural pressures within immigrant communities regarding career choices. She notes, "And so one of the things that's really challenging, especially for US immigrants, especially with certain parents that come with that, is that they make the joke in Haitian Creole culture, at least us, you know, second-generation, third-generation kids, that lawyer, nurse, engineer, doctor—if you're not one of those four, failure, done, failure to the family, shame on you, yadda, yadda." She critiques this narrow definition of success: "That is

quite a detriment because a community, a society, a civilization is made more than just lawyers, doctors, nurses, engineers. Now given coming from another country, coming from a thorough rural country, it makes sense that you would want these like core structure pieces people, right? But we're in the States now and the pathway to success is colorful." The collective experiences highlight how mentorship and support significantly influence professional trajectories. Stephen reflects on the informal yet impactful guidance he received: "They helped uplift and guide me. It was never anything negative; it just wasn't formal mentorship, but it was still very impactful." Similarly, the dedicated mentorship provided to Andje facilitated her transition into the workforce: "That kind of mentorship made a huge difference for me."

### **Conclusion**

This study illuminates how part-time employment at Florida State University (FSU) Libraries shapes the professional development of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) alumni by centering the lived experiences of individuals like Stephen, Yamilee, and Andje. Their narratives reveal the vital role of culturally resonant mentorship, the compounded challenges faced by first-generation graduates and immigrants, and the transformative power of support systems that extend beyond traditional professional relationships. By centering these personal accounts, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion within higher education and academic libraries. It underscores the limitations of purely formal mentorship models and advocates for relationship-based approaches that acknowledge cultural identity and community ties. Comparing Cohort 4 with previous groups highlights both progress made and persisting systemic barriers that affect BIPOC individuals.

Ultimately, this research emphasizes the necessity of institutional policies that foster inclusive mentorship, provide targeted resources for first-generation and immigrant students, and cultivate environments where cultural identities are not only acknowledged but celebrated. Implementing these insights is crucial for creating academic library spaces that truly reflect and serve the diverse populations they support.

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<sup>ii</sup> Shaun R. Harper, “Race without Racism: How Higher Education Researchers Minimize Racist Institutional Norms,” *The Review of Higher Education* 36, no. 1 (2012): 9–29, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2012.0047>.

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